**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 4312**

**INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER [No 49-2022 SIXTH PARLIAMENT]
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**4312. Inkosi R N Cebekhulu (IFP) to ask the Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development:**

1. Whether, with regard to the steep challenges the Republic is facing in relation to issues such as food insecurity and unemployment, her department has improved its rural strategy which would promote and increase rural incomes; if not, why not; if so, what are the relevant details;

(2) whether, considering that importing food increases the cost of food for South Africans, her department has considered the establishment and/or support of a southern regional trade bloc as a way to create a more food secure region through the exploitation of diversity in the region; if not, what is the position in this regard; if so, what are the relevant details? **NW5427E**

**THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, LAND REFORM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT:**

1. Yes. The Integrated Rural Development Sector Strategy is being processed for gazetting for public comments in the second quarter of 2023. The strategy focuses on strengthening four pillars:
* The rural economy;
* Community and human development;
* Rural safety and social cohesion; and
* Cooperative governance and local government.

The Strategy seeks to coordinate and manage sectoral rural development interventions and catalytic projects addressing challenges facing rural communities in line with the National Development Plan (2030) and District Development Model (DDM).

Some of the work mentioned in the strategy has commenced already. These include improving farm access and village access rural roads, working with the Department of Cooperative Governance (DCOG) and Provincial Departments of Agriculture and Rural Development in the identification and establishment of 5 agri-hubs and agro-processing facilities; supporting at least 71 farmer production support units to become functional to adequately support smallholder farmers for food production and commercial activities by 2024 and to implement, in the medium to long-term, the development and support of 7 other agri-parks including identification, drawing and locking in of investors through a dedicated investment strategy. This also includes targeted land redistribution to rural women, youth and persons with disabilities.

The strategy also emphasises working with the key sector departments on other rural economic challenges e.g., the rehabilitation of dams and rural bridges. The Department has further aligned the strategy with the Agriculture and Agro-Processing Masterplan, working with the National House on Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership, and will identify catalytic projects in terms of the 8 other approved masterplans with the relevant lead departments.

The strategy is aligned to the Rural Safety Strategy and the Department currently participates in the Rural Safety Priority Committees. The Department will also partner with the Department of Basic Education on the development of Early Childhood Development Centres (ECDs) in rural areas and the scaling up of the Rural Education Assistant Programme in collaboration with the Department of Basic Education, targeting unemployed rural youth to improve literacy and numeracy in rural schools.

1. The decision to establish regional trade blocks is beyond the scope of the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development. Such decisions are usually led by the Department of International Relations and Trade and the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition. Additionally, the Republic of South Africa has ratified the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which works through the regional value chains to promote food security initiatives in the continent. One of the regional value chains that are promoted under the AfCFTA is agriculture and agro-processing. Under the afore-mentioned regional value chains, the various regional economic communities (REC’s) are encouraged to develop agricultural hubs that are aligned to prioritized commodities such as horticulture, grains, tea, poultry, etc.